

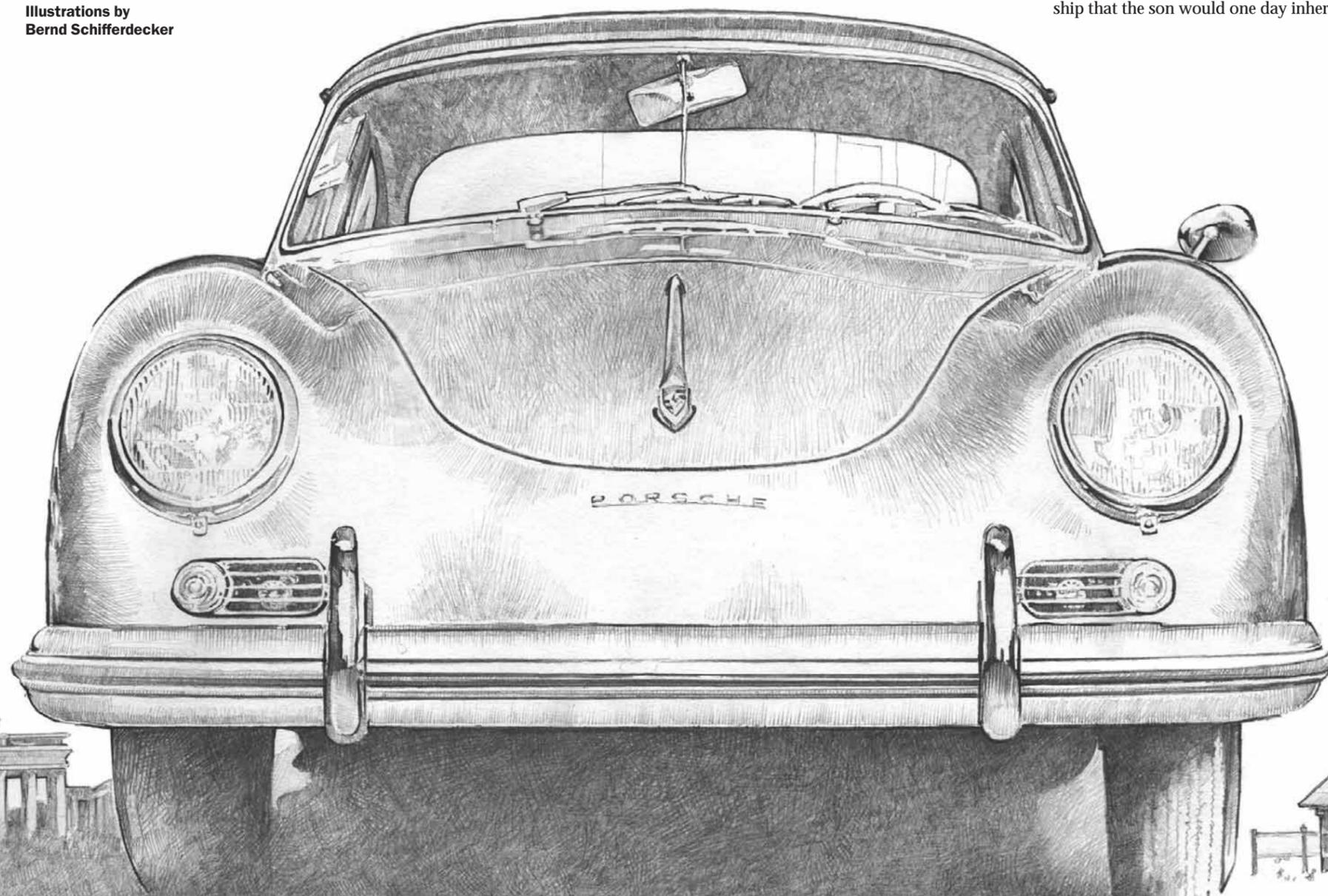
Fascination

Through Thick and Thin

How the father got his Porsche and the son never lost sight of a dream.

By
Wolfgang Peters

Illustrations by
Bernd Schifferdecker



The father did well for himself after the war. No one knows exactly how he managed to get in with so many Bavarian farmers. He is a "Prussian" from Berlin, and took part in the war before getting stranded with his mother in Bavaria. But because the time was right for new beginnings, and because he knew a thing or two about the grocery business from his parents, he began to market farmers' corn as a brand-name feed for chicken farms. He then established his own chicken farm, thinking that people might like to have a fresh egg at their breakfast table again, and a chicken in the oven. His idea quickly earned him a good deal of money.

Once, when one of the chicken farmers hadn't paid his chicken-feed bills for several months, the father paid him a visit and drove away in the farmer's car. That was in 1958, and the car was a Porsche 356 A Super. It was the beginning of a lifelong relationship that the son would one day inherit.

Before that day came, the father kept at his chicken idea. He was driven by the Germans' hunger for fresh-grilled meat. He advertised his grill mobile business with an image of a crispy roasted chicken smiling behind the wheel of a sporty convertible, even though his 356 was a coupe. It was painted silver-gray and the leather interior was red. The father loved the car and kept it for years. Even the children felt comfortable in it: the space behind the front seat was fitted with a napped rug, and the two self-installed auxiliary seats were cozy. In the children's fantasy world, the seats became walls enclosing a caged animal hovering in the rear of the car, growling as it powered the vehicle. In reality it was just the air-cooled four-cylinder, 1.6-liter engine with 75 horsepower. Father liked to drive fast, and nothing pleased him more than passing everyone else. Maybe that's why mother wasn't particularly fond of the Porsche.

The car had one other problem that was apparent to passengers only after a long drive: it smelled like roasted chicken. It seems that father always took a few crisp roasted chickens along for his chicken-feed farmers. (If you've ever seen the eyes of a farmer when he received a grilled chicken wrapped in white wax paper to keep it warm, you would understand the business genius of this man.)

His genius served him for quite some time, even outliving his first Porsche. The father drove the 1957 356 A Super until 1964, when both he and the car were inevitably heading over the hill. Keeping the 356, he switched to a "middle-class sedan," which pleased the mother to no end.

One day he came home with another Porsche. The children took note from the garden as he pulled in. They couldn't see him, but they could hear him. Their father liked to nudge the gas pedal a little more than necessary. He loved to listen to the engine roar as he shifted through the gears, and in this newer car he could hear the engine even clearer. The children were certain that their ▶

father's hardness of hearing set in when this second Porsche arrived: a 356 B Super Roadster with 90 horsepower and a pebble-gray finish. The interior was red leather again, with a big black steering wheel and controls that lit up at night like the celestial bodies of a faraway galaxy. The roof was no more than a black cloth tent. Mother continued to prefer the sedan, but in her mature days she did like to be seen in the Roadster. Her hat fluttered like a big white bird.

Father had discovered the 1962 Roadster in 1964 through a dealer who was looking for a weekend property. Using his good relationship with the farmers, the father found a property for the dealer and then came up with a new business idea. He would find and sell real estate. So he left the grilled chicken business behind, which had been threatened anyway by a competitor who had started a restaurant chain based on the chicken idea, nearly putting the old man's dilapidated grill mobiles out of business. But he had already bought the land parcels on which his chickens were grilled, and he put them up for sale while Germany's economic miracle was still riding high. This brought in a lot of money, but it also led to disastrous new developments. He ventured into a construction company and then larger and larger enterprises, eventually overextending himself.

For the son, the 356 B Super 90 represented a challenge and a turning point when he became old enough to drive. In those days people still washed and then painstakingly polished their own

cars, but no Porsche had ever shone so brilliantly before. The son changed his career plans several times, studied and pondered Sartre and Sagan, left Karl May's Wild West stories behind, discovered Henry Miller, and practiced the art of wild thought instead. But his goal had always been to reserve—and preserve—his father's Porsche for himself, to cherish it like an inheritance garnered in better times. The car seemed to possess an uncanny mechanical personality; it was almost a mystical being from the past, a better past. His dream remained to one day drive that Porsche.

But nothing came of it. The father's construction company went bust and took the Porsche with it, and though the family was not hurled into immediate poverty, the parents' automobile fleet was greatly diminished. The father now drove a VW bug, and the kids rode their bikes or the streetcar. This was to change several years later. In 1984 an inheritance brought money to the family again—and yet another Porsche. A powerful 928 S acquired by the father's younger brother three years earlier. Father was already 74, and he had never been partial to this car. It almost seemed as if he respected the car with the sentiment of a man who knows that nothing can last forever. He appreciated its comfort and the way the V-8 bubbled and blew and drove far more impressively than any of his own Porsches had. But his heart was not in this car. Perhaps he had just gotten older, and this 928 S seemed to him like the last Porsche before his driving days were to end. He also found the car too conspicuous; he was



fixated on the more modest look of his 356. In any case, the car simply disappeared one day and the father never explained its fate. He drove his bug again and often visited the old Porsche workshop. They kept an old 356 in a shed just like the one he used to drive in his happier days when he was still grilling chickens and everything smelled like one of his grill stations.

But the son never lost sight of his Porsche dream. In 1989 he acquired a three-year-old 944 Turbo, which was replaced by a four-year-old 911 Carrera 2 in 1995. When the son finally got a family of his own, the Carrera moved on. Now an older Boxster and a newer Cayenne have joined the family fleet. Father would love the Boxster and especially the Cayenne, which would be perfect for driving out to the farmers to fetch the feed.

The author is the Technology and Automobile Department editor for the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung.

